



# WHAT WORKS

## Health Communication and Social Marketing

### *Evidence-Based Interventions for Your Community*



**H**ealth communication is the study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence choices people make about their health. Messages are spread through channels such as mass media, print materials, social media, and face-to-face conversations. Social marketing is the use of strategic marketing practices to influence social behaviors and benefit the target audience rather than the marketer.

This brochure is designed to help public health program planners, community advocates, educators, and policymakers find proven intervention strategies—including programs, services, and policies—to develop successful health communication and social marketing interventions and campaigns. It can help decision makers in both public and private sectors make choices about what intervention strategies are best for their communities.

This brochure summarizes information in The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide), an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. Use the information in this brochure to help select from the following intervention strategies you can use in your community:

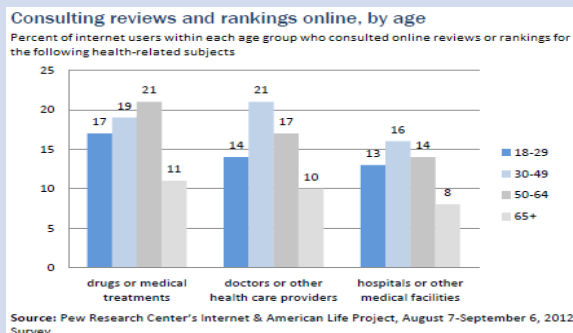
- Design health communication and social marketing campaigns that use a variety of channels, including mass media
- Develop interpersonal communication interventions, such as one-on-one conversations or group education
- Combine health communication and social marketing with other strategies to increase awareness and encourage appropriate health behaviors

The Community Guide provides evidence-based findings and recommendations from the Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) about community preventive services, programs, and policies to improve health. Learn more about The Community Guide and what works in health communication and social marketing by visiting [www.thecommunityguide.org/healthcommunication](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/healthcommunication).

*The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides administrative, research, and technical support for the Community Preventive Services Task Force.*

## THE PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE

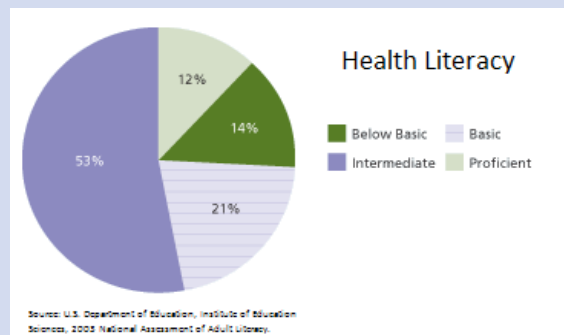
### New focus on digital and mobile technologies



- **72%** of Internet users have looked online for health information in the past year<sup>1</sup>
- **31%** of all cell phone users (including both smartphones and non-smart phones) have used their devices to look up health information<sup>2</sup>
- **Health professionals** are still central resources, as are friends and family<sup>3</sup>
- Adults, regardless of their health literacy skills, are more likely to get health information from **radio, television, personal relationships, and public health professionals** than from print sources<sup>3</sup>

For more findings from health communication and social marketing research, see [www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/research](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/research).

### Health literacy remains a challenge



- Nearly **9 out of 10** adults have difficulty using the everyday health information routinely available in healthcare facilities, retail outlets, the media, and communities<sup>4</sup>
- **Only 15%** of adults with below basic health literacy use the Internet "some" or "a lot" for information on health topics<sup>3</sup>
- People more likely to have **limited health literacy** include people over age 65, people with less education, people who are uninsured, and people who receive Medicare or Medicaid<sup>3</sup>
- Without clear information and understanding, people are more likely to **skip necessary medical tests, end up in the emergency room, and have a harder time managing chronic diseases** like diabetes or high blood pressure<sup>5</sup>

For more findings from the science of health literacy, see [www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/sciencesays](http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/sciencesays).

## EVALUATING THE EVIDENCE

- The Task Force findings and recommendations for intervention strategies related to health communication and social marketing are based on systematic reviews of the available evidence.
- The systematic reviews look at the results of research and evaluation studies published in peer-reviewed journals and other sources.
- Each systematic review looks at each intervention strategy's effectiveness and how it works in different populations and settings. If found effective, cost and return on investment are also reviewed when available.
- For each intervention, a summary of the systematic review, evidence gaps, and journal publications can be found on the Health Communication and Social Marketing section of the website at [www.thecommunityguide.org/healthcommunication](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/healthcommunication).

### Community Preventive Services Task Force

The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. It provides evidence-based recommendations and findings about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety. The Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force)—an independent, nonfederal, unpaid body of public health and prevention experts—bases its findings and recommendations on systematic reviews of the scientific literature. With oversight from the Task Force, scientists and subject matter experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conduct these reviews in collaboration with a wide range of government, academic, policy, and practice-based partners.

More information about how the Task Force conducts its reviews is available at [www.thecommunityguide.org/about/methods.html](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/about/methods.html).

## SUMMARIZING THE FINDINGS ON HEALTH COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MARKETING


All Task Force findings and recommendations on using health communication and social marketing for behavior change are available online at [www.thecommunityguide.org/healthcommunication](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/healthcommunication). Some of the Task Force recommendations related to health communication and social marketing are below.

- ✓ **Health communication campaigns** that combine multiple channels, one of which must be mass media, and distribution of free or reduced-price health products. These campaigns can increase the use of products—such as pedometers, nicotine replacement therapy, or bike helmets—that encourage healthy behaviors, help stop harmful behaviors, or protect from disease or injury. The Task Force recommends supplementing mass media campaigns and product distribution through additional communication channels, including small media, interpersonal communication, community events, and social media. For example, a campaign to increase physical activity may combine newspaper and billboard advertisements about the benefits of walking with free pedometers and brochures on how to use them.
- ✓ **Mass media** campaigns can help reduce harmful behaviors like drunk driving under certain conditions: if they are carefully planned and executed, designed to reach a wide audience, and combined with other prevention activities.
- ✓ **Small media**, such as videos or printed brochures, can be used to inform, educate, and motivate people. Studies have found them to be effective interventions for getting more people screened for breast, cervical, and colorectal cancers.
- ✓ **Interpersonal communication** can be used successfully to promote cancer screening, increase use of child safety seats in motor vehicles, and reduce violence in schools. These are usually one-on-one or group education efforts. Depending on the problem being addressed, these types of interventions may be conducted in a variety of settings, including healthcare facilities, schools, worksites, or the home.
- ✓ **Comprehensive community-wide approaches** use multiple health communication, social marketing, and other strategies to improve a variety of behaviors, including increasing folic acid supplement use in women of childbearing age, and an increase in vaccinations in targeted populations. These types of interventions are broad-based coordinated efforts targeted to the entire community.

For more information on related interventions for specific public health topics, see [www.thecommunityguide.org/about/whatworks.html](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/about/whatworks.html)

## PUTTING THE FINDINGS TO WORK

As a public health decision maker, practitioner, community leader, or someone who can influence the health of your community, you can use The Community Guide to create a blueprint for success.

- ✓ Identify your community's needs. Review the intervention strategies recommended by the Task Force and determine which ones best match your needs. Adopt, adapt, or develop evidence-based health communication and social marketing campaigns to support your programs, services, and policies.
- ✓ Explore Cancer Control P.L.A.N.E.T.'s **Research-Tested Intervention Programs (RTIPs)** community-based and clinical programs that have been evaluated, found to be effective, and published in a peer-reviewed journal. Look for the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Control P.L.A.N.E.T icon  on The Community Guide website or visit [rtips.cancer.gov/rtips](http://rtips.cancer.gov/rtips) to read about real-world programs that might be adaptable to your needs. You can learn more about RTIPs at [www.thecommunityguide.org/cancer/screening/client-oriented/rtips.html](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/cancer/screening/client-oriented/rtips.html).
- ✓ Use **CDCynergy** at [www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/cdcynergy](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/cdcynergy) to plan, manage, and evaluate public health communication and social marketing programs.
- ✓ See how other communities have applied the Task Force recommendations for health communication and social marketing practice at [www.thecommunityguide.org/CG-in-Action](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/CG-in-Action). Get ideas from their Community Guide in Action stories.
- ✓ Consult **CDC's health literacy resources** at [www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy](http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy) to develop plain language messages and materials for your health communication and social marketing campaigns.
- ✓ Craft effective messages and develop social media strategies and evaluation plans using CDC's **HealthCommWorks** suite of tools at [www.cdc.gov/HealthCommWorks](http://www.cdc.gov/HealthCommWorks).
- ✓ Use **NCI's Making Health Communications Programs Work** (also known as the Pink Book) at [www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cancerlibrary/pinkbook](http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cancerlibrary/pinkbook) to guide your communication program planning.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**The Community Guide: Health Communication and Social Marketing**  
[www.thecommunityguide.org/healthcommunication](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/healthcommunication)

**Gateway to Health Communication and Social Marketing Practice, CDC**  
[www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication)

**Health Literacy: Accurate, Accessible, and Actionable Health Information for All, CDC**  
[www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/healthliteracy](http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/healthliteracy)

**Healthy People 2020 Interventions and Resources on Health Communication and Health Information Technology**  
[www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives020/overview.aspx?topicid=18](http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives020/overview.aspx?topicid=18)



## THE COMMUNITY GUIDE IN ACTION

### Communities Use Media to Bolster Prevention Efforts



For many public health topics covered in The Community Guide, The Task Force recommends supplementing interventions with communication and marketing activities. Stories in The Community Guide in Action series show what some of these health communication and social marketing efforts look like. In rural South Carolina, for instance, a combination of a small media campaign and one-on-one health education sessions created buzz about the local health clinic's free cancer screening program. Combined with client- and provider-oriented interventions, these efforts helped increase cervical and breast cancer screening rates. In Nebraska, local health experts used a variety of interventions to pass a statewide smoking ban, resulting in statewide changes to reduce tobacco use. Read more on these and other stories at [www.thecommunityguide.org/CG-in-Action](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/CG-in-Action).

### Nationwide Marketing Campaign Makes Exercise Cool



Running from 2002 to 2006, CDC's VERB™ campaign was a national, multicultural social marketing effort aimed at children ages 9 to 13. The campaign combined mass media advertising (through television, radio, and print) with school and community promotions and Internet activities to encourage children to be more physically active. Campaign messages—crafted from targeted audience research—portrayed being physically active as cool, fun, and a chance to be with friends. After one year, 74 percent of 3,000 children surveyed in targeted markets had seen the VERB campaign. Physical activity increased among certain groups, including 9-10 year-olds, girls, children whose parents have less than a high school education, children in urban areas, and children with low baseline activity levels.<sup>7</sup> Follow-up evaluations found that increasing exposure to campaign messaging further improved awareness, attitudes, and activity levels.<sup>8</sup> Read more on VERB at [www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign](http://www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign).

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>Kotler P, Andreasen A. Strategic marketing for nonprofit organizations (6th edition). New York: Prentice-Hall; 2003.

<sup>2</sup>Fox S, Duggan M. *Health Online 2013*. Pew Research Center; 2013. Available at [www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Health-online.aspx](http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Health-online.aspx).

<sup>3</sup>Fox S, Duggan M. *Mobile Health 2012*. Pew Research Center; 2012. Available at [www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Mobile-Health.aspx](http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Mobile-Health.aspx).

<sup>4</sup>Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. *America's Health Literacy: Why We Need Accessible Health Information*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2008. Available at [www.health.gov/communication/literacy/issuebrief](http://www.health.gov/communication/literacy/issuebrief).

<sup>5</sup>Kutner M, Greenberg E, Jin Y, Paulsen C. *The health literacy of America's adults: Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy* (NCES 2006-483). Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics; 2006.

<sup>6</sup>Rudd RE, Anderson JE, Oppenheimer S, Nath C. Health literacy: An update of public health and medical literature. In J.P. Comings, B. Garner, & C. Smith (Eds.) *Review of adult learning and literacy* (vol. 7) (pp. 175-204). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; 2007. Available at [www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/ann\\_rev/rall.v7.ch6.pdf](http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/ann_rev/rall.v7.ch6.pdf).

<sup>7</sup>Huhman M, Potter LD, Wong FL, Banspach SW, Duke JC, Heitzler CD. Effects of a mass media campaign to increase physical activity among children: Year-1 results of the VERB campaign. *Pediatrics* 2005; 116(2):e277-284.

<sup>8</sup>Berkowitz JM, Huhman M, Nolin MJ. Did augmenting the VERB campaign advertising in select communities have an effect on awareness, attitudes, and physical activity? *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 2008;34(6 Suppl):S257-266.